

The Federal Flyer

Shuster Rejects Senate FAA Authorization Proposal

H.R. 1000 May Be Dead

TEXAS DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

November 15, 1999

Although the House-Senate Conference on H.R. 1000, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) authorization bill, has been meeting for weeks now, it appears that no compromise will come out of Congress this session. This situation leaves both small and large airports across the nation wondering when additional federal aviation funds will be made available for Fiscal Year 2000, which began on October 1st.

Shuster Rejects Senate Proposals. Last week, House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman Bud Shuster (R—PA) issued a press release stating that he has rejected Senate proposals to cut aviation spending. The Senate negotiators, led by Budget Committee Chairman Pete Domenici (R—NM), has insisted on its proposal to eliminate the general fund contribution to the federal aviation budget and spend approximately \$3 billion less over the next three years than the House proposal. Senators proved unwilling to back down from their position that aviation spending be subject to the federal budget process, rather than allowing full funding to flow from the user-fee-based trust fund.

“The Senate proposal simply fails to recognize the growing needs in aviation, such as the projected one billion people that will be flying annually just a few years from now,” Shuster said. He also stated that he continues to oppose further short-term extensions of the aviation programs. “This band-aid approach can only delay the significant investments that the flying public has paid for and deserves. I pledge that I will renew my efforts next year to unlock the Aviation Trust Fund and fulfill our commitment to make our skies as safe as they can be,” Shuster said in his November 10 press release.

What's Next for Aviation Funding? Congress is set to adjourn until next year sometime this week, which leaves the question of what, if anything, can be done to provide continued federal funding for the nation's aviation programs until a long-term reauthorization bill is passed. Despite Shuster's opposition, members of Congress will attempt to pass yet another short-term extension before they adjourn. The current fiscal year began October 1 without any continued authorization for funding of FAA programs, including the Airport Improvement Program (AIP), which provides money for Texas' general aviation and reliever airport program.

The Texas Department of Transportation's Aviation Division administers the

general aviation and reliever airport program for the FAA in Texas. The current plan calls for 32 federal projects to be implemented during Fiscal Year 2000. Of these projects, 15 airport design projects are underway and will be halted if the state does not receive federal funding by the end of December. Delay of these design projects will ultimately delay construction of these facilities. The department can wait until late spring or early summer before lack of funding affects the remaining 17 projects that are scheduled for construction in Fiscal Year 2000. If federal AIP funding is delayed this year, the department will have basically two full years of projects that are behind by a year.